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ABSTRACT

The Primary Acquisition of Languages Oral Language Dominance Measure (PAL) developed by the El Paso Independent School District determines a child's structural proficiency in English and Spanish and measures language dominance to aid in placing pupils in bilingual programs. PAL consists of four components, including an examiner's manual containing directions for administering and scoring the test, a picture book containing three cartoon-type pictures used in administering the test, a scoring book containing the English questions and spaces for recording and scoring the child's responses in English, and a scoring booklet containing the Spanish questions and spaces for recording and scoring the child's responses in Spanish. PAL is administered to one child at a time by a bilingual person who has undergone special training. When scoring is completed for all children, language dominance is established by converting the English and Spanish scores into language levels. Each child is then classified as Spanish dominant, bilingual, or English dominant. PAL is an economical instrument that provides valuable information on levels of language proficiency; however, it does require specialized training, particularly for the scoring process. (Author/JG)

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PAL MEASURES LANGUAGE DOMINANCE

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School districts with a large population of students of limited English-speaking ability are in need of assessment instruments to measure language dominance as an early step in implementing a bilingual-bicultural curriculum.

One instrument used extensively by school districts in Texas at grades K-3 is the PAL (Primary Acquisition of Languages) Oral Language Dominance Measure, developed by the El Paso Independent School District. PAL determines a child's structural proficiency in English and Spanish and measures language dominance for placing pupils in bilingual programs. It can also be used as a placement tool for grouping children in curriculum areas and for diagnosing competency and weakness in the basic structures of the Spanish and English languages.

El Paso's Dual Language Program is presently utilizing the PAL to assess the dominant language of all students enrolled in the EPISD grades K-3 for grouping and placing pupils in the following El Paso bilingual program instructional areas:

- Language Arts (English and Spanish),
- Spanish as a Second Language (SSL),
- English as a Second Language (ESL) and
- Spanish for Spanish Speakers (SSS). In addition, it is used for diagnostic/prescriptive purposes.

When a child's response to a test item lacks certain grammatical constructions necessary to express a cohesive thought, specific objectives which will focus on the oral development of the structure are prescribed for the pupil in a given curriculum area (i.e. Spanish as a Second Language/English as a Second Language).

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PAL consists of two language versions: English and Spanish, and four components:

- Examiner's Manual: details the use and directions for administration and scoring,
- Picture Book: contains three cartoon-type pictures used in the administration of the measure in both languages,
- Scoring Booklet: contains the questions to be asked and spaces for recording and scoring the child's responses in English and
- Folleto de Respuestas: contains the questions to be asked and spaces for recording and scoring the child's responses in Spanish.

The measure is structured to elicit a wide range of responses in English and Spanish from children, ages 4 to 9. The responses will contain a comprehensive range of syntactical items. Some elements of language measured by the test items are function words, idiomatic expressions, inflections and sentence patterns. The test items are arranged in a hierarchy for scoring purposes, and the hierarchies are different for both languages. The test items range in point value from 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest value assigned to any one item.

Approximately seven minutes of testing time should be alloted for each language. The PAL must be given by a bilingual person who has undergone special training for its administration. PAL is administered to one child at a time and should be used in a quiet area away from the classroom. The examiner must ask the test questions exactly as they are written and write the child's exact response. Both versions of the instrument are to be administered, but it is essential to test only one language at a time.

The measure is not scored until all testing in a language is complete. The same person who administers the measure should score it. When scoring the PAL,

each response must be scored individually using a standard set of criteria. One point is deducted for most grammatical errors made in a response. The test items are scored on the basis of the appropriateness to the child's response with relation to the question being asked, taking into account usage and manipulation of grammatical constructions needed to perform in natural language situations.

When the scoring process is completed for all children, language dominance is established by taking the scores in English and Spanish and converting them into language levels.

The following is an example of a test item on PAL and how it is scored.

Test item:	What happened to this little girl?	Point value 5
Response:	She f(a)ll down. (-1)	Assigned Points 4

The response as given in the example above has an error in tense: fall for fell, therefore 1 point is taken off and the response is assigned 4 points.

PAL classifies children in 3 categories: Spanish dominant, Bilingual and English dominant. These categories are essential to school districts for implementing bilingual programs and designing curriculum structures based on language classifications.

In summary, the PAL is an economical instrument which provides valuable information for determining levels of language proficiency, grouping, placement, diagnosing and prescribing. It does, however, require specialized training,

particularly for the scoring process. Overall, the PAL should be considered for use by school districts seeking a language assessment instrument.